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ABSTRACT

Distributive justice concerns the fairness of outcomes or allocations, while procedural justice refers to the fairness of the rules and processes used in the distribution of outcomes. Previous research which showed procedural justice to be more powerful than distributive justice used a work context in which the allocation recipient had no personal relationship to the respondent. A study was conducted to examine the role of personal relationships in justice situations by introducing conditions where the allocation recipient was self, best friend, acquaintance, or a stranger to the respondent. College students (N=240) read a scenario which described a work situation in which a supervisor allocated a pay increase to an employee recipient. In addition to the four allocation recipient conditions, there were two levels of procedural fairness (PF) and three levels of distributive fairness (DF). Each subject served in only one PF DF Relationship condition. After reading the scenario, each subject completed a questionnaire. The results revealed that: (1) both PF and DF had strong effects; (2) PF had greater impact than did DF; (3) the relationship variable significantly affected four of nine dependent measures; and (4) the relationship variable did not interact with the justice treatments. These findings suggest that, while the relationship variable did influence subjects' responses, it did not modify the effects of procedural and distributive justice. (Author/NB)

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ABSTRACT

PROCEDURAL AND DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE EFFECTS: THE ROLE OF PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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PREVIOUS RESEARCH USING A WORK CONTEXT (ALEXANDER & RUSS, 1985) FOUND THAT PROCEDURAL JUSTICE WAS MORE POWERFUL THAN DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE. HOWEVER, THE SITUATION WAS ONE IN WHICH THE ALLOCATION RECIPIENT HAD NO PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP TO THE RESPONDENT. THE PRESENT STUDY EXAMINES THE ROLE OF PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN JUSTICE SITUATIONS BY INTRODUCING CONDITIONS WHERE THE ALLOCATION RECIPIENT IS SELF, BEST FRIEND, ACQUAINTANCE OR A STRANGER TO THE RESPONDENT. THE FOLLOWING RESULTS WERE OBTAINED:

1. BOTH PROCEDURAL AND DISTRIBUTIVE FAIRNESS HAD STRONG EFFECTS.

2. PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS HAD GREATER IMPACT THAN DISTRIBUTIVE FAIRNESS.

3. THE RELATIONSHIP VARIABLE SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECTED FOUR DEPENDENT MEASURES IN THESE ALLOCATION SITUATIONS. THESE RESULTS WERE CONSISTENT WITH THE ACTOR-OBSERVER EFFECT FOUND IN CAUSAL ATTRIBUTION STUDIES.

4. THE RELATIONSHIP VARIABLE DID NOT INTERACT WITH THE JUSTICE TREATMENTS, WHICH PRODUCED CONSISTENT RESULTS ACROSS THE FOUR RELATIONSHIP CONDITIONS. THUS, WHILE THE RELATIONSHIP VARIABLE DID INFLUENCE SUBJECTS' RESPONSES, IT DID NOT MODIFY THE EFFECTS OF PROCEDURAL AND DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE.

Procedural and Distributive Justice Effects: The Role of Personal Relationships

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Equity theory and research has focused primarily on the social psychology of distributive justice - the fairness of outcomes or allocations (e.g., Adams, 1965; Adams & Freedman, 1976; Walster, Walster & Berscheid, 1978; Messick & Cook, 1983). Recently there has been increasing attention to a different component of justice situations, procedural justice. Procedural justice involves the fairness of the rules and processes utilized in the distribution of outcomes. The pioneering work of Thibaut and Walker examined the psychology of procedural fairness in legal situations (1975). Investigators such as Folger (1977) and Tyler and Caine (1981) extended this work into non-legal settings.

In a field study, Alexander and Ruderman (in press) recently examined the role of procedural and distributive justice in work settings. Their results indicated that both procedural and distributive fairness were important in such settings. The data also suggested that judgments of procedural fairness were more important than judgments of distributive fairness. Procedural fairness accounted for more variance than did distributive fairness on four of the criterion measures: Job Satisfaction, Perceived Conflict, Evaluation of Supervisor, and Trust in Upper Management. Distributive fairness accounted for more variance on only one measure: Turnover Intention.

In order to examine this phenomenon under controlled conditions, a program of experimental research was initiated. Alexander and Russ (1985), using a simulated work situation, found that procedural fairness had a greater influence than distributive fairness on the dependent measures of social and affective responses. In their laboratory experiment, the subject was an observer of an allocation to someone else. The recipient of the allocation was a stranger to the subject. While this paradigm has been useful in elucidating important justice issues (e.g., Tyler & Caine, 1981), there is a question of whether similar effects would occur with non-stranger social or personal relationships. In discussions of equity and distributive justice, it has been noted that the closeness of allocator-recipient relationships may influence the allocation norm preferred in an exchange situation (e.g., Austin, 1980; Greenberg & Cohen, 1982). While the question previously addressed was that of choice of allocation norm (i.e., equity versus equality), the issue may have broader implications. Will the closeness of the relationship between a respondent and the recipient of an allocation change the respondent's perceptions of fairness and his/her subsequent responses to procedurally or distributively unfair conditions? The primary question to be examined, then, is whether the closeness of the personal relationship between the respondent and the allocation recipient will modify the effects of procedural and distributive justice experimental treatments.

An important related issue involves self-other differences. In the attribution literature, actor-observer differences have been found in causal attributions made about the self as compared to attributions for the same events when they occur to others (e.g., Nisbett, Caputo, Legant & Maracek, 1973). Do self-observer differences occur when judgments of fairness rather than causal attributions are involved? If self-other differences do exist in justice situations, will they diminish as the

relationship between the respondent and the other becomes closer? Finally, do self-other differences interact with justice conditions?

PROCEDURE

Each subject read a realistic scenario which described a work situation in which a supervisor allocated a pay increase to an employee recipient. Two levels of procedural fairness (PF) were used: Procedurally Fair and Procedurally Unfair. Procedural fairness was varied by manipulating the performance appraisal system used by a supervisor. Distributive fairness was varied by manipulating the level of pay increase to the worker who was evaluated by the supervisor. There were three levels of distributive fairness (DF): More than deserved (overreward); Deserved (just reward); and Less than deserved (underreward). There were four Relationship conditions: Stranger, Acquaintance, Best Friend, and Self. The relationship manipulation preceded exposure to the allocation situation. In the Self condition, the subjects were told to seriously think about the following situation as happening to themselves, to visualize themselves in those circumstances, to throw themselves into the situation, etc. The pronouns <u>you</u> and <u>your</u> were used throughout the allocation scenario. In the Best Friend condition, subjects were first asked to identify by name their same-sex best friend (someone you like, trust, share personal thoughts with, etc.). Additional involvement instructions were also presented. The subject also had to write the best friend's name into the allocation scenario at all appropriate places. The Acquaintance condition involved naming a same-sex acquaintance (someone you see at school or work...that you do not know very well, etc.). The subject had to write the acquaintance's name into the allocation scenario at all appropriate places. The Stranger condition used a named, same-sex person unknown to the subject.

After the relationship manipulation occurred, the subject was presented with the allocation situation within which prodecural fairness (PF) and distributive fairness (DF) were manipulated. Each subject served in only one PF x DF x Relationship condition.

After reading the allocation scenario, each person responded to a 23-item questionnaire containing manipulation check items and nine dependent variables. The dependent measures were those used by Alexander and Russ (1985): Evaluation of Supervisor, Perceived Conflict in the Workplace, Job Satisfaction, Trust in Upper Management, Trust in Immediate Supervisor, Turnover Intention, Anger, Tension/anxiety, and Overall Fairness of Allocator.

SUBJECTS

There were 240 college student subjects in the experiment. Equal numbers of men and women were randomly assigned to each treatment condition.

RESULTS

1. ANOVA on the manipulation check items indicated that the experimental treatments were effective for Procedural Fairness ($p < .0001$), for Distributive Fairness ($p < .0001$), and for Relationship (assessed by two measures, $p < .03$, and $p < .001$).

2. ANOVA carried out for the nine dependent variables yielded significant PF main effects for seven of the nine measures (see Table 1). For Tension/anxiety, the results approached significance ($p < .067$) and were in the same direction as in Alexander and Russ (1985). The Turnover Intention measure was the only one which yielded no main effects for the procedural fairness treatments.

3. The DF main effects were significant for six of the nine dependent variables (see Table 1). There were no DF main effects for Perceived Conflict, Trust in Upper Management, or Tension/anxiety.

In all cases of significant main effects for the PF treatment, the fair condition produced more positive responses than the unfair condition (Table 2). For the significant DF results, Underreward produced more negative responses than either Overreward or Just Reward (Table 2). Overall, the PF and DF findings were quite similar to those of Alexander and Russ (1985).

4. In order to determine the unique effects of procedural and distributive fairness on each of the dependent variables, regression procedures were used. First, procedural fairness was correlated with each dependent measure, with the effects of distributive fairness partialed out. Then, distributive fairness was correlated with each dependent measure with procedural fairness partialed out. Table 3 presents the partial correlations which were obtained. Eight of the nine partial correlations for procedural fairness were significant. For distributive fairness, six of the nine partial correlations were significant. The partial r's were then transformed to z coefficients, and the significance of the difference between the z for PF and the z for DF was tested for each dependent variable. As Table 4 shows, procedural fairness accounted for significantly more variance than did distributive fairness for five of the dependent measures: Evaluation of Supervisor, Perceived Conflict, Trust in Upper Management, Trust in Supervisor, and Overall Fairness of Supervisor. Distributive fairness accounted for more variance on two measures: Turnover Intention and Anger. These results replicate those obtained by Alexander and Russ (1985) and also are consistent with the field study results of Alexander and Ruderman (in press). In both real and simulated work settings, procedural fairness had a relatively greater impact than distributive fairness.

5. As Table 1 indicates, the Relationship treatment yielded significant main effects for four dependent variables: Perceived Conflict, Job Satisfaction, Turnover Intention, and Tension/anxiety. The Self and Stranger conditions differed significantly on all four dependent measures (see Table 5). The responses in the Self condition were significantly more negative than responses in the Stranger condition. This probably results from the fact that, because of the experimental design, two-thirds of the subjects experienced procedural unfairness, underreward, or both of these unfair treatments. Since the subjects regarded the pay increase as significantly more important in the Self than in the Stranger condition (Relationship manipulation check item 2), unfair treatments would be expected to lead to more negative responses in the Self condition.

For all four of the dependent variables which yielded significant Self-Stranger differences, it also can be seen that the mean scores for the Best Friend and Acquaintance conditions were intermediate between the Self and Stranger, although not significantly so (see Table 5). These findings in a justice context are congruent with those obtained in causal

attribution studies of actor-observer differences (e.g., Finney & Helm, 1982; Taylor & Koivumaki, 1976).

6. There were no significant PF x Relationship nor DF x Relationship interactions for eight of the nine dependent measures, suggesting that the effects of the fairness treatments are relatively consistent across differing personal relationship conditions. While the Relationship treatment had an impact on four of the dependent variables, it did not interact with the effects of procedural or distributive fairness.

DISCUSSION

The Relationship variable did produce differences in responses to an allocation situation, as demonstrated by the significant main effects for four of the dependent variables. These results involving fair and unfair conditions were consistent with causal attribution studies of actor-observer differences. However, the relationship variable did not interact directly with procedural fairness or distributive fairness. That is, the effects of procedural and distributive fairness were the same whether the allocation recipient was a stranger, an acquaintance, one's best friend, or the self. The effects of the fairness treatments transcended the personal relationship between the respondent and the allocation recipient, providing further evidence of the impact of these justice variables.

In several recent papers, Greenberg has suggested that performance appraisal situations in organizations are significantly affected by perceptions of both procedural and distributive fairness (Greenberg, 1986; Greenberg, in press). In the present study comparing procedural and distributive justice effects, it is clear that procedural fairness had a greater impact than distributive fairness, in spite of the fact that the focus of the scenario was on a distributional action: A pay increase to an employee. These findings from a laboratory simulation are consistent with those from the Alexander and Ruderman field study (in press). However, the results should not be interpreted as indicating that distributive fairness is unimportant in work situations. We agree with Greenberg (1986) on this matter. Distributive fairness produced significant main effects on six dependent variables. In addition, when the effects of procedural fairness were partialed out, the partial r's between DF and six dependent variables were still significant. What the comparison of the partial correlations tells us is that PF contributes more unique variance than does DF to the relationship with the dependent variables. That is, procedural fairness was more important than distributive fairness for a work scenario involving performance appraisals and pay increases.

Finally, the results once again indicate that in studies of justice and fairness, whether in the laboratory or field, both procedural and distributive fairness must be examined if we are to better understand justice phenomena.

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TABLE 1

Summary of Analysis of Variance Results for Procedural Fairness (PF), Distributive Fairness (DF), and Relationship Effects

	Procedural Fairness		Distributive Fairness		Relationship	
Dependent Variable	F	p	F	p	F	p
Evaluation of Supervisor	84.68	<.001	6.83	<.001	.28	--
Perceived Conflict-Harmony	39.50	<.001	1.67	--	3.36	.020
Trust in Upper Management	93.02	<.001	2.27	--	.21	--
Job Satisfaction	17.89	<.001	4.34	.014	3.00	.032
Trust in Supervisor	153.29	<.001	22.32	<.001	.15	--
Turnover Intention	2.05	--	24.12	<.001	2.76	.043
Tension/ anxiety	3.38	.067	1.14	--	4.19	.007
Anger	18.88	<.001	140.19	<.001	.99	--
Overall Supervisor Fairness	106.25	<.001	40.85	<.001	.58	--

NOTE: Degrees of freedom for PF = 1, for DF = 2, and for Relationship = 3. Total N = 240.

TABLE 2

Summary of Cell Means for Procedural (PF) and Distributive (DF) Fairness Effects

	Procedural Fairness		Distributive Fairness		
Dependent Variable	Fair	Unfair	Over Reward	Just Reward	Under Reward
Evaluation of Supervisor	8.58a	5.82b	7.68a	7.55a	6.36b
Perceived Conflict/ Harmony	8.23a	6.55b	7.31	7.76	7.09
Trust in Upper Management	4.64a	3.11b	3.85	4.10	3.66
Job Satisfaction	10.50a	9.37b	10.29a	10.10a,b	9.41b
Trust in Supervisor	9.15a	5.87b	8.15a	8.13a	6.25b
Turnover Intention	10.22	9.76	11.14a	10.13b	8.70c
Tension/anxiety	4.97	4.64	4.75	4.68	4.98
Anger	5.68a	4.89b	6.45a	6.26a	3.15b
Overall Supervisor Fairness	5.19a	2.78b	4.56a	4.51a	2.88b

Note: For each independent variable, means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$. Higher values represent more positive responses.

TABLE 3

Partial Correlations of Procedural (PF) and Distribute (DF) Fairness with Dependent Variables

	Procedural Fairness		Distributive Fairness	
Dependent Variable	r	p	r	p
Evaluation of Supervisor	.50	<.001	.22	<.001
Perceived Conflict/Harmony	.35	<.001	.04	--
Trust in Upper Management	.52	<.001	.06	--
Job Satisfaction	.26	<.001	.17	.005
Trust in Supervisor	.60	<.001	.33	<.001
Turnover Intention	.10	.067	.39	<.001
Tension/anxiety	.11	.053	-.06	--
Anger	.24	<.001	.65	<.001
Overall Supervisor Fairness	.65	<.001	.44	<.001

TABLE 4

Z-Score Tests of Significance Comparing Strength of Procedural (PF) and Distributive (DF) Fairness Effects

Dependent Variable	Z_{PF-DF}	p
Evaluation of Supervisor	3.55	<.001
Perceived Conflict/Harmony	3.44	<.001
Trust in Upper Management	5.62	<.001
Job Satisfaction	1.03	--
Trust in Supervisor	3.75	<.001
Turnover Intention	-3.30	<.001
Tension/anxiety	.50	--
Anger	-5.75	<.001
Overall Supervisor Fairness	3.34	<.001

Note: Positive z indicates stronger procedural fairness effects; negative z denotes stronger distributive fairness effects.

TABLE 5

Summary of Cell Means for Relationship Effects

	Relationship			
Dependent Variable	Self	BF	Acq.	Str.
Evaluation of Supervisor	6.98	7.28	7.23	7.20
Perceived Conflict/Harmony	6.87a	7.72ab	7.02a	7.95b
Trust in Upper Management	3.78	3.93	3.85	3.92
Job Satisfaction	9.38a	9.88ab	10.30ab	10.43b
Trust in Supervisor	7.53	7.45	7.63	7.42
Turnover Intention	9.37a	10.07ab	10.03ab	10.48b
Tension/anxiety	4.35a	4.88ab	4.79ab	5.18b
Anger	5.37	5.18	5.15	5.45
Overall Supervisor Fairness	4.13	4.05	3.87	3.88

Note: Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p<.05$. Higher values represent more positive responses. BF = best friend, Acq = acquaintance, and Str = Stranger.